

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH**  
**– Interim Charge #1 – SB633**  
(per posting hearing for October 5, 2020)

*Submitted by John Henderson, CEO and President, Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals (TORCH). TORCH is the trade association of the 157 rural hospitals across Texas.*

*Regarding Interim Charge #1 – SB633*

*Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following: **SB 633**, which provides the authority to assemble local mental health authorities (LMHA) in rural areas into groups in order to ensure access to mental health services in those areas. Conduct oversight of the process of grouping individual LMHAs and the development of a plan for each group to increase capacity and access.*

The legislature deserves credit for making significant progress involving behavioral health by modernizing the state hospital system and recognizing parity in tele-psych services, but there is more work to be done.

Rural Texas remains essentially a huge behavioral health provider shortage and underserved area, and telehealth is a big part of the solution. We hope to see continued collaboration between the local mental health authorities (LMHA's) and rural hospitals to extend services to those who are most isolated and most in need.

We'd also appreciate and support more demonstration projects aimed at rural behavioral health and the unique access challenges faced by most rural Texans.

Thanks for considering our perspective and feedback in this matter.

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